ULEE'S GOLD

How an old man returned to the world.

Screenplay By

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1. EXT. TUPELO "YARD" -- MORNING

Tall blossom filled trees stand proudly over the dark tannic acid red waters of a tupelo marsh. The trees are densely packed. Light reaches the near black waters in narrow shafts. One could get lost here fast.
A strange unidentified HUMMING SOUND fills the air.

Begin Main Titles:

ULEE'S GOLD

We move slowly back onto a clearing on higher ground and past a SIGN:

PROPERTY OF ULEE JACKSON -- STAY OFF!

In the distance we can just make out a white flatbed truck loaded with stacks of white wooden boxes.
A YOUNG MAN in a loose work suit and net hood is tying down the load of hives.
The HUMMING grows louder.

Smoke from a bellows floats in as BEES swarm over gnarled bare hands calmly lifting a brood laden frame out of a hive.

Intense sharp eyes look out from under a tented hat.
ULEE JACKSON, a wiry reticent man in his early-fifties, checks the frame--

The BEES loom large and on alert, but the hands remain calm as they turn the frame. The frame holds.

We see the QUEEN, only slightly larger than her workers, busily laying eggs.

ULEE stares for a moment at this familiar essential mystery.

Then quickly he reinserts the frame,

slips on the hive's lid,
and moves on.

ULEE walks toward the truck with a slight permanent limp.
We move down to the CROWDED MOUTH of the hive.
BEES fill the air. The HUMMING never stops.

2. EXT. MARSH FOREST ROAD -- MORNING

In the distance the white flatbed truck,
loaded down with wooden hives,
moves along the edge of the dark marsh.

In places the road is under water,
and the truck must use all four wheels to make it through.

3. EXT. SECOND TUPELO YARD -- MORNING

The white truck idles next to a pickup truck parked near a large grass covered mound of earth surrounded on two sides by water. An ancient rusted tractor stands strangely in the middle of the dark water pond.

Another pickup truck pulling a long flat trailer bed sits on top of the mound surrounded by a hundred or more hives. TWO YOUNG MEN, one black the other white, also wearing protection against the bees, are working the yard. The trailer is already half loaded with boxes.

ULEE gets out from the passenger side,
and the YOUNG MAN from the first yard drives on.

ULEE approach the others.

The three confer a moment,
then resume loading the upper boxes called supers.
ULEE works right along with the others.

JUMP TO:

The trailer is now nearly full.
The work of tying down the supers has begun. One of the young men is taking off his bee shirt and hat.

ULEE splits from the others and approaches the pickup.

ULEE
You got it from here, Charley. Meet you'all back at the house!

FIRST YOUNG MAN (CHARLY)
Sure thing, Mr. Jackson!

ULEE starts the truck
and moves out.

4. EXT. FOREST ROAD -- DAY

Ulee's truck moves out from the muddy marsh road

onto a paved country highway.

5. EXT. BRIDGE ACROSS THE CHIPOLA -- DAY

The truck moves across the low narrow concrete bridge. The river with its tall cypress and tupelos stretches out into the distance.

6. EXT. EDGE OF WEWAHITCHKA -- DAY

The truck pulls up to the single traffic light. Establish the small North Florida town, a row of shops, including a gas station, and a video store.

The light changes and the truck moves on.

End Supered Main Titles.

7. INT. LOCAL BAR -- AFTERNOON

Two beers frame a small stack of papers. Hands hold a pen

as ULEE scans the form.

MAN'S VOICE
... So he says to me, I'd just as soon they cut the state off just north of Orlando, and let the rest float right out into the Gulf. I had to say it didn't sound like such a bad idea.

ULEE looks up without humor.

ULEE
(referring to the form)
Fair enough on the bakery grade, Chance, but I want seventy-six for the tupelo.

CHANCE BARROW, a large friendly older man in khaki, protests in mock horror. Behind him we can make out the random ramblings of the small tavern-- a pool game being played, tired men gathered at the counter.

CHANCE
Ulee!

ULEE
I'll sell it myself. Fact is, I'm thinking about--

CHANCE
Can you extract by next week?

ULEE
I'll give you thirty barrels. The rest I keep.

CHANCE takes the contract and scratches in a change.

CHANCE
Well. It should be a good year, 'least as long as they keep the Chinese from dumping their honey.

ULEE
The Chinese don't have anything like our tupelo.

CHANCE
That's a fact, Ulee, but most folks don't seem to care anymore. If cheap honey floods the market--

ULEE
The bees and I have an understanding, Chance. I take care of them, they take care of me. We'll just all have to work harder, is all.

ULEE signs the contract, then looks up at wall--

A large wall clock indicates 2:30.

ULEE
Gotta go.

CHANCE
(smiles) If all my suppliers were like you, Ulee, it--

ULEE
(handsover contract) Then I WOULD worry about the competition.

CHANCE
Any word from Jimmy?

ULEE
We don't keep in touch.

CHANCE
Almost two years, ain't it?

ULEE
(stands) ... Near about.

CHANCE
Still seems hard the way they--

ULEE
Everyone's gotta take care of their own shit, Chance. I'm not involved... See you next week.

CHANCE
I'm counting on it.

ULEE crosses quickly past CHANCE and away.

8. EXT. BAR -- AFTERNOON

ULEE exits and heads toward his truck.

Across the street, SHERIFF BILL FLOYD is climbing out of his patrol car. Ulee's age, BILL looks formidable but fair in his dark green tailored uniform. He spies ULEE and seems eager to talk. Moving to truck:

BILL
Ulee! Wait up!

ULEE
Can't right now, Sheriff.

ULEE climbs in his truck and starts the engine.

BILL
But Ulee! It's been a long time now, Can't we get back to the way things were?

ULEE sees that CHANCE has also exited the bar and is approaching. Things are getting too crowded.

ULEE
No Bill, I don't think we can.

BILL
Mary keeps wanting you over for supper. You can't stay cut off forever--

ULEE
It's a busy time, Bill. But tell Mary thanks for asking.

ULEE forces a smile, and drives away.
CHANCE joins BILL staring after the truck.

BILL
I wonder if he's ever gonna pull out of it.

CHANCE
He's stubborn is all, and he's got a lot on his mind.

BILL
Hell, we've all got a lot on our mind, Chance. With Ulee it's just not natural.

CHANCE isn't sure what to think as he looks down the road after Ulee's departing truck.

9. EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENTRANCE -- AFTERNOON

ULEE stares blankly into space in his pickup as KIDS stream out to waiting vehicles. Suddenly he looks up--

PENNY JACKSON, about ten, comes running toward the truck loaded down with sweaters, lunch box, books, and construction paper artwork.

PENNY
Hi, Ulee. How you been?

PENNY climbs quickly into the truck, a brave child with a nervous vulnerability.
ULEE, despite himself, looks over with concern and affection as his granddaughter closes her door and settles in for the ride.

ULEE
What you got there?

PENNY
It's a bunny-- for Easter.

ULEE
Don't look like much.

PENNY
'Course it ain't, Gramps.
It's just pretend.

10. EXT. ULEE'S HOME AND YARD -- LATE AFTERNOON

Ulee's truck pulls up next to an old rambling wooden home on the edge of town. A dirt road runs out front, cans of flowering plants line the porch. Behind the house we can see various sheds and the trucks from the morning. The THREE YOUNG WORKERS are busy unhitching the trailer and loading the last of the boxes into a storage room.

Next door, CONNIE HOPE, a nurse in her late 40's, is opening the door to her car.

PENNY climbs out of the truck.

PENNY
Off to work again, Connie?

CONNIE
Afraid so, Penny. (to Ulee)
Did you get the rent check,
Mr. Jackson?

ULEE
Yes, Miss Hope. I did. Is
everything O.K.?

CONNIE
Everything's fine. Take care.

CONNIE slides into her car, starts the engine, but does not drive away before taking a warm appreciative look--

after PENNY and grocery laden ULEE.
ULEE casts a quick look back,
then looks quickly away when he sees her still looking.

PENNY
I'm glad Connie is our new
renter, aren't you, Ulee? I
like her lots better than old
Mrs. Pritchard.

ULEE
We hardly know her, Penny. It takes more'n a couple of months to know somebody.

PENNY
But she's a nurse, Ulee. All nurses are nice.

ULEE
Is that right?

CONNIE'S car moves past behind them as ULEE and PENNY enter the house.

11. INT. ULEE'S HOME -- LATE AFTERNOON

Fragile young hands with shocking purple fingernails set plates onto an oil cloth covered table. The table is set for three-- like the rest of the kitchen and house, simple, clean, and old fashioned.

CASEY JACKSON, fourteen and desperate, looks up from her work as ULEE and PENNY enter. CASEY is dressed to shock with pink spiked hair, too many earrings, and punk-style clothes.

ULEE and PENNY seem not to notice as they proceed with unloading school books and groceries.

CASEY
Good day?

ULEE
Not bad. Aren't you starting all this a little early?

CASEY
It's Friday, Ulee, I already asked about tonight. You said it was O.K.

ULEE
I know what I said... Is it that Mexican again?

CASEY
That's right.

ULEE
And where are you going?

CASEY
To the arcade. Where else?

ULEE
And that's all. Do you hear?

There is growing tension here. CASEY will not be threatened.

CASEY
To tell you the truth we were thinking of running away, going to Mexico maybe, and robbing a few banks. After all, it runs in the blood. Shouldn't be any trouble at all going wild.

ULEE
That's enough! Don't even kid about it.

The two try to stare each other down, then turn as they notice a gentle HUMMING coming from the next room--

12. INT. PENNY'S ROOM -- LATE AFTERNOON

Through the doorway we can see PENNY playing quietly.

She seems oblivious to all the tension.

ULEE and CASEY stand looking on behind her.

ULEE
I got to pay the guys.

He turns and leaves.

CASEY continues with her prep work.

13. INT. HIVE STORAGE -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE walks through the white windowless room inspecting the floor to ceiling rows of boxes called supers.

ULEE steps to the door

and turns out the light.

14. EXT. HONEY HOUSE AND HIVE STORAGE -- LATE AFTERNOON

The THREE WORKERS stand by the flatbed truck. ULEE joins, taking out checks from an envelope. We stay back as the checks are handed out.

CHARLEY
Thanks, Mr. Jackson.

ULEE
Thank you, Charley. You boys did good.

The other TWO WORKERS nod their thanks and head toward the other pickup truck. CHARLEY hangs back.

CHARLEY
Mr. Jackson. I was wondering if I could stay on through extracting and the move.

ULEE
(considers a moment)
Thank you, Charley, but no.

CHARLEY
But it's mighty hard work, Sir. I mean especially for a man your age. Couldn't you use some help?

ULEE
(smiles)Guess I DO feel right old, Charley, but I've gotten used to going it alone... Thanks again.Maybe next year.

CHARLEY
(accepts defeat) Yes, Sir. Just thought I'd ask.

ULEE nods, standing suddenly alone as CHARLEY turns to join the others.
The truck starts up, the lights go on, ULEE watches.

15. INT. KITCHEN -- DUSK

ULEE, CASEY, and PENNY sit quietly, automatically, finishing supper. ULEE appears distracted, lost in thought.
Through the window we see a car drive up outside. HONKS.

CASEY jumps up taking her dishes to the sink. She quickly scrapes the leftovers into the garbage and rinses her plate.

ULEE
You be home by eleven-thirty.

CASEY
We'll try.

ULEE
There's no 'trying' to it. Be here.

CASEY
And you try to figure out a way to make me.

ULEE jumps up, furious.

But CASEY is already out the door

and beyond ULEE'S reach as he follows her outside.

16. EXT. PORCH -- DUSK

ULEE bitter but also concerned follows CASEY out onto the porch. He feels helpless and hates the feeling, but cannot forcibly hold CASEY back as

she runs down the steps and toward the waiting car.

ULEE
You'll have to pay the rest of your life for being a jackass!

CASEY
Anything's better than dying of boredom!

17. INT. OLD CHARGER -- DUSK

CASEY jumps into passenger seat and looks over at--

MARK GARCIA, a young male punk equivalent of Casey. At the moment he is looking back with concern at--

ULEE who stands on the porch, perhaps threatening to come down to the car.

CASEY sees his alarm, and seems suddenly very tired:

CASEY
Just gun it. Markie, and get us the fuck out of here.

MARK looks over,
then suddenly obeys.

CASEY leans back in the seat,
and smiles at the sounds and feelings of escape.

18. EXT. FRONT YARD -- DUSK

ULEE stands looking out at the vanishing car.

He slumps, for one moment at a loss,

but then quickly regroups

and heads off around the house.

19. INT. HONEY HOUSE WORK ROOM -- DUSK

A small conveyer assembly and two large stainless steel drums about five feet in diameter stand out in the center of the clean but cluttered room. This room is devoted to extracting honey and is full of large wooden boxes for comb storage, pumps, drums, and tanks.

ULEE huddles at the side of the conveyer belt, working on part of the chain drive.

Behind him on one wall and almost buried behind the clutter of a work desk is a small half forgotten area of Vietnam War memorabilia including a wooden plague bearing the logo for the 7th Cavalry, a Purple Heart, and a FADED PHOTO OF A PLATOON READY FOR JUNGLE PATROL.

PENNY wanders in,

climbs up on a cleared area of the table,
and idly plays with a small plastic horse.

ULEE
You're supposed to be getting ready for bed.

PENNY
It's Friday night, Ulee. I can stay up a little bit.

PENNY is content to sit, part of a quiet rhythm between herself and ULEE.
She leans over, picks up,

and studies the PHOTO--

THE YOUNG MEN STARE BACK, FULL OF WILD DARING. The faces are young and beaming. Black, white, Latino-- brothers in arms.

PENNY
And they're really all dead?
Every last one of them?

ULEE looks over, but does not answer.

PENNY
'Cept for you. All dead?

ULEE
That's right.

PENNY
(staring at photo)
Had they been bad? Did they deserve dying?

ULEE is surprised by the question.

ULEE
No. No, they didn't.

PENNY
Why then? (holds up photo)

ULEE
(shrugs) Bad luck and a bunch of idiots running the show. ...Those were good guys... Maybe only the tricky made it through. That's why your granddad made it. Tricky, lucky, and... And I shouldn't be talking to a little kid about terrible stuff that happened a long time before she was even born.

PENNY
But it's so sad, Ulee.

PENNY carefully returns the photo to its private place.

ULEE
'You like sad?

PENNY
Not always, but sometimes.
It makes you quiet inside.

ULEE allows himself a moment of thoughtful surprise.
From inside the house we hear the PHONE RING.

ULEE stops what he is doing
and limps out, in no particular rush to get the phone.

20. INT. LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

ULEE picks up the phone in the tiny living room.
PENNY comes in from outside, moves to her room,
and settles back into her private world.

MAN'S VOICE (on phone)
Dad, hello, Dad?

ULEE
... Jimmy.

JIMMY (on phone)
I've got to see you.
Tomorrow. Will you come?

ULEE
Next week maybe. We just
brought in the tupelo.

JIMMY (on phone)
That could be too late.
Please. Helen's in trouble.

ULEE
So what else is new? (Penny
is nearby, he knows this and
whispers) I could care less,
and you know it.

JIMMY (on phone)
Please, Dad. This is
different. I wouldn't be
calling if it wasn't.

ULEE
(giving in)
Hours still ten to one?

JIMMY (on phone)
That's right.

ULEE
I'll be there at noon.

JIMMY (on phone)
... How are the kids?

ULEE
Fine. Great. What the hell do you think?

JIMMY (on phone)
I'll see you tomorrow.

ULEE
Yeah.

He hangs up as PENNY comes to the doorway.

PENNY
Who was that?

ULEE
A man wants to sell me some hives. I guess I'll give 'em a look-see. Now it's time for bed. Pick your book and I'll be in to read you good night.

PENNY leaves.

ULEE picks up Penny's construction-paper bunny with it's basket of colored eggs.

Each one has a name on it: ULEE, PENNY, CASEY, as well as HELEN, and JIMMY. The last two names are circled in gold.

21. INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

ULEE sits motionless, eyes wide in the near darkness.

Beside him there is a PHOTO OF A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG MOTHER PROUDLY HUGGING HER TEN YEAR OLD SON-- Penelope and Jimmy. Over their heads a banner reads: Spirit of '76.

ULEE sits up and LISTENS as a CAR APPROACHES outside,

a DOOR SLAMS,

and the CAR PULLS AWAY.

FEET RUN UP the outside steps,
and the front door opens.

CASEY tries to tiptoe in,
then freezes when she sees ULEE wide awake in his chair.

She stands up defiantly, waiting for the worse.
Instead:

ULEE
You're daddy called tonight.
Something's come up.

CASEY
... Is he getting out?

ULEE
(nods no)
I have to go see him tomorrow. You'll need to take care of Penny. I should be back in time for supper.

CASEY
Get somebody else. Like Connie Hope next door. I got things to do.

ULEE
We don't ask outsiders for help, Casey. You know that.

CASEY glares back, furiously holding back tears.

CASEY
Tell Dad he might answer my letters sometime.

She turns
and closes the door behind her.

ULEE doesn't move.

22. EXT. ULEE'S FRONT YARD -- DAWN

ULEE walks toward his truck, thermos in hand.

He climbs inside and suddenly stops--

A light next door turns on in a small window.

CONNIE'S silhouette passes smoothly behind the shade.

ULEE watches in a brief moment of longing,
then turns the ignition.

The sky is just turning
as ULEE backs up his truck

and drives away.

23. EXT. TRUCK ON HIGHWAY -- MORNING

Ulee's truck moves down
and past on an isolated road through
the North Florida pine lands.

The truck veers away and onto
INTERSTATE 10. We stop on the overpass and watch the
truck merge and blend with the endless river of traffic.

24. EXT. PRISON GATE -- MID-DAY

Ulee's truck stops at the guardhouse entrance.

ULEE gets a pass,

then drives by a sign: Raiford State Prison

The prison, surrounded by an inner perimeter of razor
wire, looms ahead.

25. INT. PRISON VISITOR'S ROOM -- MID-DAY

Guards stand at doorways. Prisoners sit at tables
talking to visitors.

ULEE sits down at a table, looking for someone. For a
brief instant his eyes light up with joy then pain as--

A YOUNG MAN is let in through a distant door. In his
early thirties, JIMMY JACKSON moves like a cornered cat,
eyes concealing, a sense of desperate self control.

A wave of heartbreak moves over ULEE'S face before he stiffens into his usual formality.

JIMMY sits down, stares at some unknown object, then finally gives a quick glance to ULEE-- the tension between the two should be palpable:

ULEE
Casey says she'd like to hear from you.

JIMMY
(nods)
She claims you're giving her a hard time.

ULEE
Just trying to keep a lid on her hormones. At the rate she's going, she'll be starting a baby even before you and Helen did. One round of fools is enough, don't you think?

JIMMY has no answer. He turns still and serious.

JIMMY
Helen is in Orlando. She's been working as a waitress or something.

ULEE
Next time you talk to her, ask her to send something home to her kids.

JIMMY
She hasn't been in touch.

ULEE
Then how do you?--

JIMMY
'Remember Eddie Flowers and Ferris Dooley?

ULEE
They still robbing Minit Markets?

JIMMY
They were in a bar down there on the Trail, and she stumbles in strung out on something. She was acting so crazy someone was gonna call the cops. Somehow Eddie and Ferris got her out of there and took her home.

ULEE
(sarcastic)
They was always good boys.

This is all very hard for JIMMY.

JIMMY
Eddie called yesterday. He says she's lost her job and is barely hanging on. They've got their eye on her right now, but can't stick around for long.

ULEE
I wouldn't trust those bastards any farther than I could spit.

JIMMY
Neither would I... That's why you've got to go get her. Right now. While we know where she is, and before Eddie or Ferris--

ULEE
(terrified)
Get her! And then what? She left her own kids, YOUR kids, remember? You know this is my busiest season. I risk losing the bees if they don't get moved right away, and old man Chance wants the tupelo yesterday... And I'm supposed to risk everything to bring back a, a god damn... As far as I'm concerned she can just stay gone.

JIMMY
(tries to endure)
She's sick, dad.

ULEE
But I don't know nothing about dealing with jerks like Eddie and Ferris. Besides, you think she's gonna let me march in there and take her off? Just like that?

JIMMY
You're all we got, Pop.

ULEE sits wide eyed and fearful. The pain and necessity of the job ahead begins to sink in.
He looks up and catches--

JIMMY staring at him.
JIMMY looks quickly away.

ULEE studies his worried cornered son.
We hear a DISTANT PHONE RINGING--

26. INT. ULEE'S HOUSE -- DUSK

The phone is in Ulee's living room.
It rings again.
CASEY answers the phone.

CASEY
Hello.

ULEE(on phone)
How are things going?

CASEY
Where are you!

ULEE(on phone)
Casey. You're going to have to take care of things for awhile longer. There's food there. Get Penny to help---

CASEY
But I've been taking care of her all day! I'm ready to kill the creep.

ULEE(on phone)
Tell her everything's O.K. And Casey. I may be bringing your mom home.

CASEY freezes not certain how to feel.

CASEY
Why bother?

27. EXT. ORLANDO PAY PHONE -- DUSK

ULEE holds the receiver tightly, recognizing Casey's discomfort. Traffic flies by behind him on a highway.

ULEE
I'm afraid that was my feeling exactly, but your dad is real--

CASEY(on phone)
How was he?

ULEE
O.K. I guess...

28. INT. LIVING ROOM AGAIN -- DUSK

CASEY stares hopelessly into space.

CASEY
Where are you now?

ULEE(on phone)
Outside Orlando. I've only got a phone number. So far there's been no answer.

CASEY
Typical.

ULEE(on phone)
Yeah. Well. I'll keep trying. You all take care of yourselves.

CASEY
No sweat. See you tomorrow.

CASEY slowly hangs up the phone.

She looks up and over with discomfort--

Her boyfriend MARKIE is comfortably stretched out on the couch.

PENNY sits on the back step,
laughing and talking to herself
in the fading light.

CASEY watches a moment longer.

29. EXT. ORLANDO PAY PHONE -- SUNSET

ULEE dials a number.

The PHONE RINGS,
and RINGS again.

There is no answer.

ULEE hangs up

and moves outside.

He is parked near a Waffle House full of customers.

ULEE climbs back into his truck

and waits. He stares out as--

The SKY IS AGLOW WITH SUNSET.

Giant billboards proclaim the glories of
Florida's wonderland.

We hear the SOUND OF A PHONE BEING DIALED,
it RINGS.

30. EXT. TRUCK ON ORLANDO HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

From inside the truck we move past a seemingly endless strip of bars and dance halls-- the underbelly of Orlando's miracle.

The PHONE RINGS again.
This time someone answers. We continue down the highway as OFF CAMERA:

MALE (on phone)
Speak to me!

ULEE (on phone)
Is that you, Eddie?

MALE (on phone)
Who wants to know?

ULEE (on phone)
Ulee Jackson. Jimmy said--

MALE (on phone)
Mr. Jackson! We've been waiting for you. When do you want to get together?

ULEE (on phone)
The sooner the better.

MALE (on phone)
We'll be at the Orange Blossom on the Trail in thirty minutes. I'll be wearing a green leather hat and an orange shirt. See you there. (the PHONE CLICKS OFF)

30A. ULEE is looking for STREET ADDRESSES.

He strains to see something on his right--

The ORANGE BLOSSOM BAR looms large ahead.

ULEE turns in.

31. INT. ORANGE BLOSSOM BAR -- NIGHT

ULEE makes his way through the crowded club. A topless dancer moves almost ignored in the background. Pool tables are kept busy with games played by burley construction workers, drifters, and their dates.

ULEE looks around--

At the last table a man wearing a green hat and orange shirt makes a shot. He moves quickly around the table, always joking. His waiting partner, a scare crow with long wild hair and wild eyes, stands pounding his cue into the floor.

ULEE approaches
and stands quietly near the table--

The man in orange, EDDIE FLOWERS, scowls as he misses a difficult shot. He looks up and realizes ULEE is there. His partner, FERRIS DOOLEY, moves in to take a shot.

EDDIE
It's great to see you Mr. Jackson. 'Been awhile.

ULEE
Not long enough, Eddie. But I guess some things can't be helped.

ULEE smiles as he says this.

EDDIE smiles back-- manners in a snake pit.

32. EXT. ORLANDO BUNGALOW ROW -- NIGHT

Ulee's Truck follows

a late model Dodge Charger with a

bad muffler into the yard of a rundown bungalow.

Engines and lights are turned off.

All get out

and head toward the front door.

33. INT. BUNGALOW BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The three men tiptoe into the dark messy room, a single bedside lamp dimly reveals a huddled form half buried in the covers. Appearing meek and concerned, EDDIE and FERRIS stand aside.

ULEE passes and approaches the bed, instantly suspicious amidst the filth and squalor of drugs. There is a feeling of danger here, as if the two buddies could explode at any minute. ULEE stops near the lamp--

Tangled up in a filthy sheet
HELEN is a shocking mess.

Hair matted, black petticoat frayed, she moans briefly when the men enter, then is silent.

ULEE looks with wide horrified eyes.

He picks up one arm and can't help but notice bruises and rope burns around her wrist.

EDDIE
(whispering)
She kept walking in her sleep, Mr. Jackson. We had to tie her up sometimes.

Shocked by what he sees, ULEE carefully puts HELEN'S arm back on the bed.

34. INT. BUNGALOW KITCHEN -- NIGHT

ULEE sits deep in thought at the kitchen table as EDDIE wipes two mugs with a greasy towel and pours coffee.

EDDIE
It's booming down here. What with the Mouse and all, this is where all the smart money is setting up.

ULEE
Yeah?

EDDIE
You wouldn't believe the opportunities. Ferris and me, we got it made. Too bad Jimmy can't be here with us.

ULEE has heard very little of this.

ULEE
What's she on?

EDDIE
Down here they call 'em "roofies." Mix them with a beer or two, and god knows. You can go wild and crazy, then not remember a thing in the morning.

FERRIS snorts a laugh.

FERRIS
That's not for me, no sir.

ULEE
Where has she been staying?

EDDIE
We ran into her working at a Waffle House a few weeks ago. Something bad had happened, I think she was splitting up with some guy, and she asked us to look out for her.

ULEE
But I thought you'd just met.

EDDIE
(covering)
No. I told Jimmy she surprised us when she showed up like that... at the bar I mean.

ULEE
And I suppose you had to keep her drugged?

EDDIE
We didn't know how to stop her. Most folks would have just turned her over to the police

ULEE
Jimmy's lucky to have such good friends.

EDDIE
That's right. But she's too much for us, Mr. Jackson. That's why we called Jimmy.

FERRIS
That and something else.

ULEE
What do you mean?

EDDIE
Well, there are some things you just don't want to discuss on the phone. Specially to someone in jail.

ULEE
Why don't you just go there then, talk to Jimmy personal?

EDDIE
(smiles) Ferris and me, we seem blessed with luck as far as the law is concerned. But we're not gonna do something as dumb as go inside where folks might check us out and such. Not me. I don't want to give anybody a chance to... You understand.

ULEE
So?

EDDIE
Telling someone his wife needs help. That's safe enough on the phone. And it brings a messenger. Someone who can deliver special more private information. Don't get me and Ferris wrong, Mr. Jackson. We're glad to have found Helen here and to be part of getting her to her kin and home...

FERRIS
She's a sweet piece of ass, even if she is a mother.

ULEE, by now in a state of private fury, works to maintain his outward calm.

EDDIE
Shut up Ferris!... (then straight at Ulee) There is a little matter of some money. We thought it was lost, but I always wondered... Tell Jimmy a little bird told us all about it. Since he's in there for awhile yet, well we figure we could make good use of it, invest it and such, 'till he gets out.

ULEE gets up,
and puts his chair under the table.

ULEE
I don't have anything to do with Jimmy's crap. You want to give me Helen, fine. Otherwise I'm out of here.

FERRIS seems to panic, EDDIE stands.

FERRIS
Eddie! What do we--?

EDDIE
Shut up, Ferris!

A face off.

EDDIE
(to Ulee)
I don't think you quite understand what--

ULEE
Save it, Eddie. I think I better get going.

ULEE walks toward the exit.

FERRIS is confused and desperate.
He jumps around the table,

grabs ULEE and

tries to throw him against a wall.

ULEE deflects FERRIS'S initial lunge and turns.
ULEE prepares for another attack,
but then suddenly stops cold.

EDDIE brings the barrel of a gun to ULEE'S throat.
ULEE doesn't blink.

EDDIE
Are we listening now, Mr. Jackson?

ULEE
You want a message delivered.

EDDIE
We want the money.

EDDIE slowly backs off.
FERRIS straightens up, laughing with wicked glee.

ULEE
It's going to take awhile getting her settled. And I've got three or four days with my bees before I can get back to Jimmy. I don't care what you say.

EDDIE
Take a week. We've got time. And you've got our number. One week. Tell Jimmy, no cash, we're coming after all of you. Understand?

ULEE
Completely.

EDDIE
And don't bother calling the law 'cause we'll know and we'll just wait. The laws can't figure us out. Remember that. We're immune. We can't be touched.

ULEE
Fine, Eddie. That's fine.

ULEE begins to straighten his shirt,

and heads to the bedroom.

EDDIE and FERRIS stare at each other, not certain if they have the upper hand or not.

ULEE(from next room)
Does she have a suitcase? Bag? Or something?

The two men turn toward to door.

35. INT. BUNGALOW BEDROOM -- NIGHT

ULEE holds HELEN up. He is quick, almost rough with her as he wraps a shirt around her shoulders, and works to get her arm into the sleeve.

EDDIE and FERRIS stand at the door.

ULEE
Where's her stuff? I've got a long trip ahead... I'd just as soon do as much as I can with her asleep.

HELEN looks around, disoriented, trying to focus. She looks up at ULEE and suddenly appears terrified.

HELEN
NO!

She begins to struggle.

ULEE slaps her.

She falls into a heap.
FERRIS laughs his laugh and pulls a duffel bag out from under the bed.

ULEE'S eyes reveal a private urgency as he gathers HELEN up

and heads outside. EDDIE and FERRIS follow.

36. EXT. BUNGALOW -- NIGHT

HELEN collapses into the passenger side of Ulee's truck.

ULEE circles.

EDDIE
Tell Jimmy "Hi" for us.

ULEE
Right.

FERRIS
And the two little girls. I bet they've grown.

ULEE climbs into the truck without saying another word.
The truck engine turns over.
The duffel bag is tossed in back.

37. EXT. ULEE'S TRUCK ON ROAD -- NIGHT

ULEE is exhausted and distraught over HELEN'S condition.

She is fevered, more or less knocked out the whole time.

38. EXT. ULEE'S TRUCK ON MID-FLORIDA INTERSTATE -- DAWN

ULEE drives, fighting sleep.

HELEN slumps, facing her door.

Her eyes begin to open.
She looks out from her stupor--

on a gray foggy blur of rolling hills and horses.

She stares a moment longer, expressionless,
then shuts her eyes,
grimaces with some dark pain,
and adjusts her position against the seat.

ULEE looks over,
still overwhelmed by what he has on his hands.

39. EXT. WACISSA STREET AND CHURCH -- NOON

ULEE rubs his face and looks up to see--

Members of a church moving toward their cars and talking on the sidewalk, a disorienting whirl of bright colors and curious faces.

HELEN is also waking up and sees--

the properly dressed and smiling town folk turn to stare.

ULEE must slow for a car pulling out.

HELEN begins to shake her head back and forth.

HELEN
No. No. No. NO!

ULEE looks over with alarm.

ULEE
Helen. Calm down. This isn't the place.

Her eyes wide with hatred,
shé starts looking around for something on the floor.

HELEN
Where are my shoes? I'm getting out of here. Where the hell are they?

PEOPLE are staring in earnest now.

ULEE senses and loathes

as he shifts into gear,

tears around and past the car,

and away from the busy street.

40. EXT. ULEE'S HOUSE -- DAY

The truck pulls in

and comes to a jerky stop.

ULEE sits frozen for one minute,
then seeing HELEN opening the door,
he jumps out

and rushes around the truck.

HELEN'S EYES move in and out of focus.
A horror is dawning.
She is back at Ulee's!

ULEE tries to move her quickly toward the house.

PENNY and CASEY have come to the door.

ULEE gets HELEN to the bottom of the stairs.
HELEN looks back and forth at her two daughters--

CASEY looks back with painful scorn.

CASEY
Why did you bring her back?

HELEN wants desperately out.
She spins violently,
breaks from ULEE'S arms,

and starts running.

ULEE grabs her from behind
and begins the process all over again.

ULEE
Casey doesn't mean it, Helen. Right now, let's just all get inside.

HELEN
No! I don't want to be here... in this... fucking hell hole.

With great difficulty ULEE picks HELEN up,

climbs the porch steps,
and heads into the house.

Throughout all this PENNY hovers along the edges, watching this struggle of the giants. We must worry about her-- that she will be knocked over, pushed aside, what she must be thinking.

PENNY stays out on the porch as the screen door slams. Suddenly she turns,
runs down the steps, and out of sight.

41. INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

ULEE stumbles through with HELEN. CASEY closes the door then runs around to block the way.

CASEY
(sarcasm near tears)
You're looking great, mom. Where you been, anyway? Taking care of things? Fixing things up like you said you would? Get her out of here, Ulee. She stinks!

ULEE
That's enough, Casey. Shut up or I'll slap you one.

CASEY
You and who else?

ULEE gets HELEN across the LIVING ROOM and through the door to ULEE'S bedroom.

42. INT. ULEE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

HELEN is more or less thrown onto the bed.
ULEE'S eyes are wide with desperation. What now?

HELEN is up and charging for the door.
ULEE catches her again, but not before HELEN has grabbed a lamp. She swings it wildly.
Books, photos, a radio, go flying.

The lamp itself shatters to pieces against the wall.

CASEY
Just hit her, Ulee. Knock her out. It's the only way you're going to get her attention.

ULEE finds himself sprawled across the bed on top of HELEN. She gives ULEE a suggestive leer and begins to laugh wildly.

HELEN
Is this what you want, Ulee? You should have said so in the first place, you bastard!

CASEY
Bitch! Slut! Cunt!

CASEY is suddenly silenced by the sight of--

HELEN, the laughter turned suddenly to deep sobs, tears welling, silent screams wracking her body.

ULEE hangs on,
looks up and is alarmed to see--

42A. EXT. BACKYARD AND RENTAL HOUSE -- DAY

PENNY is leading CONNIE toward backdoor.
CONNIE is not sure she should come, but PENNY is persistent.

42B. INT. ULEE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

ULEE is horrified.
He tries to get up.
For one brief moment, HELEN is lost in her pain.

The SOUNDS of the SCREEN DOOR and footsteps.

ULEE looks over as--

CONNIE peers cautiously around the door frame.

CONNIE
Excuse me. Can I help?

ULEE
No, Miss Hope. We've got it under control.

ULEE shakes his head no, but he is exhausted and stuck with what he knows is more than he can handle.

CONNIE crosses and gently begins to examine HELEN,

pulling her hair back off her face,
looking into her eyes.

Suddenly HELEN turns furious again,
throwing CONNIE back onto the floor, grabbing another lamp, and swinging at ULEE.

He dodges the lamp,
falling back against a dresser.

CONNIE is there.
She grabs HELEN and throws her back onto the bed.

CONNIE
Have you got some rope? And a couple of sheets. She's got to be tied down.

ULEE moves off leaving CONNIE practically sitting on HELEN, hands holding wrists, her weight barely constraining HELEN'S thrashing body.

CONNIE
Hold her while I get... Casey! Get the bag from the chair by my front door. And hurry...

CASEY hesitates,
about to refuse,

then turns and runs outside.

ULEE looks with open shock and sorrow at HELEN'S pain.

43. EXT. SHED/ WORKROOM -- DAY

ULEE gets some rope.

Heading back he sees--

CASEY running back from Connie's house,

her concern for her mother obvious as she carries a large black leather bag across the yard

and into the house.

44. INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

The bag sits on the table, CASEY stands to one side as ULEE returns with the rope.

CONNIE
Where's the sheet!

ULEE jumps to a nearby closet
and pulls one from a shelf.

CONNIE
Now hold her down.

ULEE dutifully puts down the sheet
and awkwardly trades places with CONNIE.

He feels stiff and ineffective, underestimating HELEN'S desperate strength.

CONNIE starts looking through her bag

and prepares a syringe.

CONNIE
Is this just a bad day or is
she coming off something?

ULEE
"Roofies?" I've never heard
of it.

CONNIE
(concerned recognition)
Rohypnol... And probably some
other stuff along the way...
It could be worse.

She leans forward and
gives HELEN an injection.

ULEE
But how do you know what?--

CONNIE
It's just to calm her down.
Casey! Put this on the table.
Careful with the point.

CONNIE passes the needle off to a much alarmed CASEY,

urgently grabs the rope and sheet,
and begins to tie and secure HELEN'S wrists to the bed.

HELEN finally begins to surrender her struggle as the medication starts to take effect. She turns and glares at ULEE in a final moment of vicious clarity:

HELEN
Everyone's life you ever touched is fucked. Do you know that, Ulee? "Pop?" No one was good enough... Ever!

ULEE hears.
Everyone hears.

HELEN'S eyes begin to close.

Finally she is silent.
The others breathe a sigh of relief.

ULEE moves back.
CONNIE throws the sheet width-wise over HELEN
and secures one end.

CONNIE
What's her name?

ULEE
Helen. She's my daughter in-law.

CONNIE walks around to the other side and ties the other end of the sheet, binding HELEN'S body to the bed.

CONNIE
Well, Helen ought to be in a hospital.

ULEE
No.

CONNIE(sighs)
I figured as much... Better make something to eat. I'll see what I can do to clean her up a bit. If you've got any plastic sheeting, I'll put it under her. (ULEE looks alarmed) It's going to be a long messy night.

ULEE rubs his forehead trying to gather himself and moves toward the door. CONNIE heads toward the bathroom.

CASEY and PENNY have been standing against a dresser. We get a brief glimpse of a row VARIOUS FAMILY PORTRAITS as the two move up, daring closer looks.

PENNY
Is she our mom?

CASEY
(totally confused)
If you want to call her that. I guess she is.

CONNIE returns with a pan of water and a wash cloth.

The kids step back and watch a moment longer before

CASEY takes PENNY by the shoulders and gently leads her out of the room.

45. INT. KITCHEN -- DUSK

ULEE pours soup into two large mugs

and puts them in front of CASEY and PENNY.

CASEY
How was dad?

ULEE
O.K. Worried... I have to go back and see him again in a few days?

CASEY
Can I go?

ULEE
It'll be during the week. First I got to move the bees.

CASEY
Can I go?

ULEE
Not this time, Casey. Jimmy and I have got some serious talking to do.

CASEY
Sure!

CASEY stalks off.
PENNY sits a moment
slowly stirring her spoon.

ULEE regrets what's going on, but does nothing.

ULEE
Finish your soup, honey.

PENNY grabs the bowl
and gulps. The soup is hot but bearable.
She puts the mug down
and looks up at ULEE.

PENNY
Is mom gonna be O.K.?

ULEE
Sure.

CONNIE enters.

ULEE
Want some tea or something?

CONNIE
Thank you, no. I'm gonna head on. She should rest tonight. Tomorrow it may start all over again. I'll check by in the morning before work.

CONNIE starts to leave.
ULEE follows her to the door.

ULEE
Thanks, Miss Hope.(it hurts to say) We couldn't have--

CONNIE
Save it, Mr. Jackson. It's something I know how to do.

ULEE
(privately)
I'm sorry you had to hear all that. It's been--

CONNIE
You don't need to explain. Good night.

ULEE closes the door and turns to see--

PENNY, still sitting at the table.

46. INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

ULEE reads to PENNY who seems to have a hard time listening.

Finally she turns facing the wall and curls into a ball. ULEE notices, stops reading, and closes the book.

ULEE
Goodnight, Penny.

PENNY
Goodnight.

47. INT ULEE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

ULEE sits in near darkness watching HELEN.

He falls asleep.
NOISES!
He wakes up to find--

HELEN, twisting and tortured, half awake, delirious.

ULEE stares on,

wide eyed and helpless.

48. INT. BEDROOM -- MORNING

Hands untie HELEN'S limp wrist.

CONNIE checks HELEN'S pulse.

Suddenly HELEN is wide awake.

She turns crazy.

And fires her free hand at CONNIE'S face.

CONNIE is knocked back on the floor.

HELEN tries desperately to untie her other hand

and escape.

Another BATTLE
as ULEE and CONNIE once again must

force HELEN down on the bed.

CASEY and PENNY have come to the door to witness--

ULEE again sprawled on top of HELEN,

and CONNIE preparing
another shot.

HELEN fights the drug,
but finally succumbs.

CONNIE and ULEE stand
numb from their effort.
He looks over at the girls.

ULEE
You two better get breakfast.

They leave slowly.

ULEE stares down at HELEN.
CONNIE closes her bag.

ULEE
I've got to start moving the
bees off the tupelo.

CONNIE
Casey should be able to handle things for a few hours, and I can get back around noon. But we can't go on replacing one drug with another. If Helen can't settle soon, you're gonna have to get more help.

This is all distressing to ULEE, but he nods and heads out.

49. INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

PENNY sits at the kitchen table, huddled into a small mass.

ULEE worries.

ULEE
Penny. Reckon you could miss school a day and help me moves some bees?

PENNY looks up, relieved and grateful.

PENNY
I wouldn't mind.

50. EXT. MARSH FOREST ROAD -- MORNING

ULEE drives the large flatbed truck. Exhausted, hands at the wheel, he tries to let the wind clear his head.

PENNY sits nearby, eyes looking out at the marsh, then up at ULEE.

PENNY
How many places you keep bees?

ULEE
Three or four at a time. It changes during the year.

PENNY
Did you ever lose any?

ULEE
You mean forget where they were? (she nods yes) No. I don't think so.

PENNY
That's good.

The truck pushes through a muddy patch.

51. EXT. TUPELO YARD #3 -- MORNING

Up ahead a yard of hives comes into view.

Several of the hives lie torn up and scattered on the ground.

The truck pulls up and stops.

ULEE turns off the key, eyes staring out with a sense of endless hardship at--

The damage. Hives have been knocked over, carried off a few yards, and ripped apart-- signs of an animal invasion. BEES are everywhere.

PENNY(off camera)
What happened?

ULEE
A bear had himself a snack.

PENNY
Is he coming back?

ULEE
Not likely. But you never know.

PENNY
And the bees. Are they hurt?

ULEE
Some got scared off. But if we look around, we might find a few...

He scans the area, then sees something--

A SWARM of bees hangs from the limb of a small cypress.

JUMP TO:

ULEE stands by the truck lighting his smoker.

He adjusts his hood and hands another to PENNY --

ULEE
Here, Penny, you wear this hat and gloves, just in case.

PENNY stays near the truck
as ULEE grabs an empty hive box from the back,

and approaches the swarm.

PENNY
Aren't you afraid of gettin' stung?

ULEE
(movements calm and relaxed)
You just have to keep your calm around bees. They can sense fear right off and it makes them panic...Quiet now.

ULEE moves up expertly onto the SWARM,
gives them a puff of smoke,
then places a box underneath the mass
and shakes the branch.

The BEES drop almost gratefully into their new home.

Some of the BEES move onto ULEE'S bare hand.

His face grimaces briefly.
He stops, looks down at his hand--

With one finger he flicks a bee off his left hand,
covers, then lifts the hive, and carries it back toward the truck.

ULEE sets the hive down on the bed of the truck
and prepares for the real work at hand.

PENNY
You're real good.

ULEE
(smiles) Sometimes.

PENNY
...You know. I thought I remembered my ma.But I don't.

ULEE
...You will. Just be patient. That's all.

The lift is swung out.
The hoist unwound.

And ULEE moves to the line of hives, stacking them four deep.

PENNY wonders off toward the destroyed box.

She bends down to stare at--

the remains of splintered frames and ripped combs.

ULEE continues with his task, lifting one stack of hives quickly onto the truck with the hoist.

52. EXT. IN TOWN GAS STATION -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE pumps gas into the hive loaded and netted flatbed truck. PENNY stands sipping a Coke next to ULEE. He appears impatient and annoyed at the sight of--

BILL standing next to a car on the street nearby.
The Sheriff Cruiser's light is flashing.
BILL tears off a ticket and presents it to the motorist.
A school bus full of kids roars by.

PENNY turns to watch the bus move away.
ULEE checks the pump's meter,
then looks back in the direction of the Cruiser.

BILL folds his ticket book as the car pull away,
then turning back to his Cruiser,
sees ULEE and heads over.
ULEE sees BILL approaching, and turns grim as he clicks off the pump, and caps his tank.

BILL
Penny! My goodness, you haven't grown up on us, have you? (she doesn't answer)

ULEE
Still hitting up on the tourists, are you, Bill?

BILL
Gotta earn my salary, Ulee. The bribes and kickbacks just aren't enough these days.

ULEE
Guess you gotta do all kinds of disgustin' things when you work for government.

BILL
(suddenly defensive)
I didn't have nothing to do with Jimmy needing to be put away. He did that on his own.

ULEE
That's one place you and I agree.

BILL
Damn it, Ulee! Six years is long enough to mourn anyone... (gently) Even Penelope. SHE wouldn't have wanted it.

ULEE doesn't answer,
and instead heads toward the cab.

ULEE
Get in the truck, Penny.

BILL
How's Helen?...

ULEE
(stops dead in his tracks)
Connie Hope told you.

BILL
You can't figure something like that's gonna stay secret?

ULEE
It's Jackson mess, Bill, and Jackson's are the ones who've got to deal with it.

BILL
I know, Ulee, but--

ULEE reaches into the cab and pulls out a large jar of honey.

ULEE
Here. Consider it a "bribe" and leave us alone.

BILL
(surrendering)
It's always welcome. Take care, now. You too, Penny.

ULEE drives away. PENNY looks back to watch as--

BILL looks on with a sense of sorrow and concern.

53. INT. ULEE'S HOME -- AFTERNOON

ULEE and PENNY enter to find--

CONNIE giving CASEY a tray with a cup of orange juice and a sandwich.

CASEY glares briefly at ULEE, then carries the tray into the next room.

CONNIE looks after CASEY, then turns back to the stove.

CONNIE
Helen's settled. It's all turned inward now. For her it'll be the hardest part.

54. INT. BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON

HELEN sits up in bed, bitter and hateful, but now resigned, almost catatonic--

a silent face off as ULEE approaches stiff and defensive.

CONNIE steps back, trying not to interfere. Behind her, PENNY looks around the corner unnoticed by the grown ups.

HELEN
You should have left me alone in Orlando. I was doing fine.

ULEE
Jimmy asked me. Once you're well, I don't care what the hell you do. But you're not moving 'till the poisons out of you, if only for a day.

HELEN
Old man. You always think you know, don't you.

ULEE
I know a hell of a lot more than to run away from my responsibilities.

HELEN glares back with a cold critical gaze.

HELEN
Is that right?

ULEE
Right.

HELEN
There's all kinds of running, Ulee. Your body might have stuck around, and that lousy bully part of your mind, but your heart took off a long time ago... 'Fact, I'm not sure it ever made it back from Nam.

ULEE
(a choked whisper)
That's not true.

CONNIE
(stepping in) Ulee. You should go. Get washed up--

ULEE
(ignoring Connie)
No! It was you and Jimmy wanted too many short cuts. For what? I told Jimmy if he went down that road I wouldn't lift a finger to help. And you both managed a high class fuck up. Mrs. Helen Jackson, mother and wife! NOTHING!

CONNIE is now physically guiding ULEE out of the room. He turns to her, miserable in his rant.

ULEE
(to Connie)
And we don't need the whole god damn world knowin' what's going on in our house.

CONNIE glares back defiantly and

closes the door on him.

55. INT. KITCHEN -- AFTERNOON

ULEE huddles at the table drinking tea. CONNIE enters and leans against the counter. There is still tension here, but there is also some drawn-together-by-circumstance fascination at work.

ULEE
Have some tea.

CONNIE
Thanks...

CONNIE watches as ULEE gets up, takes out another cup, and fills it with hot tea. She looks outside:

CONNIE
Looks like quite a load.

ULEE
I don't normally stop here with a truck full of bees... But as you know, nothing's too normal at the moment.

CONNIE sits. ULEE places the filled cup, a spoon, and saucer in front of CONNIE and returns to his place at the table.

CONNIE picks up the Honey Bear on the table, pours some into her cup,

then a bit extra on a finger.

ULEE watches her as she tastes the honey and stirs her tea.

CONNIE
What's the word for bee keeper? Apiary? Apiarist.

ULEE
"Bee keeper" is easier.

CONNIE
Somebody told me there used to be lots of honey made around here.

ULEE
I learned from my Dad. He learned from his. But it's hard work, and not many young folks want to bother. Most don't realize how important bees are for farmers. 'Course around here tupelo honey is our premium grade, but the bloom only last two, maybe three weeks. Most of our money comes from working that bloom. Then the bees get moved to late flowers for bakery grade. That's what the load's for outside. They go up about two hours from here to honey dew, and then there's another move in January for winter clover. What with all the extracting, and watching for diseases, and... (realizes he's been rambling) I'm sorry. Best not to get me going on bees.

CONNIE sits a moment,
curious about this tired confused new neighbor.

CONNIE
May I ask about your wife?

ULEE stares at CONNIE, surprised at the question, not sure he wants to answer. Then suddenly the need is there:

ULEE
Penelope died six years ago. ... We grew up together.

CONNIE
... What did she do?

ULEE
... Kept house. Cared for folks... She had a lot to put up with: the hitch in 'Nam, hospital time for my knee, raising Jimmy without a dad around, me working to build the hives back up when I wasn't sure anything made sense anymore. And just when it looked like... I guess there's never a good time to lose someone. It hit Jimmy and Helen hard. ... I pretty much fell off the planet.

CONNIE
You must have loved her very much.

ULEE
If it hadn't been for Penny and Casey... (smiles) and the bees... Maybe you can be too close... I'll never know if she was ever really happy.

ULEE wipes a tear from his eye, and offers a small pained smile. He turns back to his tea.

ULEE(continues)
Pardon me. Guess I'm kind of worn out.

CONNIE stares a moment, screwing up her own nerve.

CONNIE
Now me, I'm divorced. Twice, actually... No kids, fortunately... I guess, fortunately.

ULEE looks up, surprised. He makes no comment.

CONNIE(continues)
This time I moved as far away as I could. I like the country and being near water, so here I am. (studies Ulee) You don't approve, do you?

ULEE
I didn't say anything.

CONNIE
I can tell. You're an old fashioned ties-that-bind kind of guy.

ULEE does not disagree.

CONNIE
Whatever happens, you stay the course. Isn't that right?

ULEE
... Mrs. Hope, lately I'm realizing I don't know enough about anything to say nothing.

CONNIE
(smiles) It's Connie. (she gets up to leave) I'm sorry about the Sheriff. He said folks had seen you and Helen coming into town.

ULEE nods, remembering the drive in. CONNIE writes on a small piece of paper and hands it to ULEE.

CONNIE
Here's my work number. Keep me posted.

ULEE sits motionless as the doors close behind CONNIE. He rubs his eyes, a man who never sleeps.

DISSOLVE TO:

56. EXT. ROAD THROUGH TOWN -- LATE AFTERNOON

The truck moves quickly past

the busy intersection and GAS STATION .

57. EXT. DESERTED COUNTRY HIGHWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE leans forward to look ahead.

The distant truck inches along the snakelike road as it moves through the GENTLY ROLLING PINE LANDS.

58. EXT. HILLTOP DIRT ROAD -- NEAR SUNSET

The truck slows,
turns off the dirt road,

across a cattle guard,
and into a field of dark ominous oaks.

59. EXT. HILLTOP FIELD -- TWILIGHT

Moving past the row of off-loaded hives
we first hear, then see the lift being secured on the now empty truck.

ULEE works quickly. Behind him the hives
stand guard in their new home.

ULEE starts the truck

and is off.

60. EXT. ROAD THROUGH TOWN -- NIGHT

ULEE struggles to stay awake at the wheel.
He looks up to see--

the GAS STATION, now closed with only a single security light glowing inside.

61. EXT. ULEE'S BACKYARD AND HONEY HOUSE -- NIGHT

The lights are off in ULEE'S HOME. Beyond
the truck is a dark outline against the warm light
coming from inside the HONEY HOUSE.

62. INT. HONEY HOUSE -- NIGHT

A blade cuts smoothly over the top of a honey filled
comb. The frame suspended on an automatic extractor.

ULEE is in the midst of extracting honey. He loads the
open frames into a large stainless steel drum,
closes the lid,
and throws a switch.
Motors begin to hum, belts begin to turn the inner drum.

ULEE comes through the door with a cart full of more honey boxes. Behind him a CLOCK SHOWS 12:30.

The extractor is still spinning.
From a drain at the bottom honey begins to flow into a storage tank. Another pump move up and over toward a cheese cloth filter. The motor is turned off.

ULEE lifts the lid,
and begins to remove the now empty combs.

The blade cuts through another frame.

The honey pours through the filter.

ULEE unloads. Behind him the CLOCK NOW SHOWS 4:11.

ULEE stacks a load of empties in a corner.

63. EXT. TUPELO YARD #2 -- SUNRISE

The flatbed lift truck sits in the middle of the yard. The marsh and nearby water pick up glints of color from the rising sun. Most of the hives have already been stacked four tall. ULEE does one more,
then heads to the truck.

ULEE swings the truck's lift arm over,
secures the hive,

lifts,

and glides the hive onto the truck's bed.

ULEE guides the lift back toward the hives.

A quick series of overlapping shots follows.
Another hive is secured.
Placed on the truck.
Jump cuts of hooking up one hive

after another. We hear the ENGINE START.

The loaded truck

drives out of the now empty yard.

64. EXT. CHIPOLA BRIDGE -- SUNRISE

The truck tears by,

the distant trees barely visible
against the blue grey sky.

65. EXT. CLOVER FIELD -- MID-MORNING

The truck drives through a gate and

stops in the middle of the empty field.

ULEE places the final hive.

He straightens his stiff back
then leans down toward the hive.

ULEE watches--

One bee moves out slowly,
stops,

then takes off.

ULEE stares a moment. More bees fill the air. He seems amazed by this simple primal process.

The truck moves off the yard.

66. INT. ULEE'S HOUSE -- DAY

ULEE enters utterly exhausted and
finds CASEY sitting talking seriously on the phone.

CASEY
But why can't I come?.. I know... Soon? He just came in the door... Miss you, dad. Take care.

CASEY hands the phone to ULEE

who takes a deep breath before picking up the receiver.

ULEE
Hello, Jimmy. I've been meaning to call you.

JIMMY(on phone)
I've been going crazy! How is she? What the hell's going on?

ULEE
(weary)
Helen is O.K... We think.

JIMMY(on phone)
Eddie called. Said you had something important to give me. So why haven't you come?

ULEE
I'm trying to get over there day after tomorrow.

JIMMY(on phone)
What do you mean? I need to see you now!

ULEE
I'm moving bees, Jimmy, and my back is killing me. Day after tomorrow. IF I'm still standing. (he hangs up) Has Connie been by?

CASEY
She checked in. Said she figured we'd be O.K. today without her. She also took Penny to school.

Disappointed despite himself.

ULEE
And Helen?

CASEY
Out like a light. Connie said she's making up for lost time.

ULEE
Good for her.

CASEY
Is Dad in trouble?

ULEE
(decides to be honest)
I don't know. Might be. I'll know more when I see him.

CASEY and ULEE share a moment.

ULEE, joints stiff and painful, lies down on the floor.

CASEY
I can pull out the couch.

ULEE
My back. The floor is better. I'll only be a minute.

He falls immediately to sleep.

CASEY watches a moment,
leaves,

and returns with a light blanket.

She covers ULEE,
then tiptoes away.

ULEE
Wake me in time to get Penny.

67. EXT. SCHOOL YARD -- AFTERNOON

Another pick up. ULEE'S hair still wet, face shaved.

PENNY climbs in

carefully holding a folded piece of construction paper.

ULEE
What you got there?

PENNY
Nothing... It's for my Mom.

She stares straight ahead tightly clutching the paper.

68. INT./EXT. KITCHEN -- LATE AFTERNOON

CASEY is again on the phone. She watches--
ULEE and PENNY climb out of the truck.

CASEY
No. I can't tonight, Markie. ...Of course! I miss you too! But right now I'm really busy... Talk to you later... Bye.

CASEY hangs up the phone
and begins to clean a counter.
ULEE and PENNY come through the back door.

PENNY continues on through and out.

ULEE
(to Casey)
How is she?

CASEY shrugs her shoulders
with a quiet hopeful smile.

ULEE puts down a bag of groceries.

Then slowly follows PENNY,
curious to see what's going on.
He approaches the door to the BEDROOM
and peaks inside--

69. INT. BEDROOM -- LATE AFTERNOON

HELEN lies on the bed, still weak and very still.

PENNY is leaning on the bed,
the construction paper open in front of her.
She is explaining the simple drawing to HELEN.

PENNY
... and see sometimes the bees get confused and run away. That's them on the tree there. But they don't really want to be gone, and they're happy when someone helps them back into their home. But you gotta keep calm and don't panic when they sting 'cause they don't really mean nothing by it...

HELEN
And you made this all by yourself?

PENNY
No sweat. I can make you a new one tomorrow if you want.

HELEN
That would be real nice.

ULEE stays hidden behind the door--

PENNY(off camera)
And that's the tupelo swamp. And that's what Ulee does when he goes out to his bees.

HELEN smiles for the first time.

70. EXT. TUPELO YARD #3 -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE walks along the side of his loaded truck,

climbs inside,
starts the engine,

and pulls out.

71. EXT. CLOVER FIELD -- DUSK

The truck, loaded with hives,
moves through a gate
and out next to a group of oaks.
ULEE straps the lift around a hive,

and gets to work.

72. INT. HONEY HOUSE -- NIGHT

ULEE is again loading open frames into the extractor.

CASEY comes in dressed for work.

CASEY
O.K. So what do I do?

ULEE
Go to bed.

CASEY
Give me a break, Ulee.

She moves around, ready to help.

ULEE
Then get on the other side, take out the spent frames and stack them in that box with the others.

CASEY pulls out two frames

and does what ULEE said. He watches a moment,

then grabs a large steel drum and rolls it under the large holding tank.

He opens a valve.

A large flow of honey pours into the drum.

73. INT. KITCHEN -- DAWN

ULEE'S closed eyes twitch in troubled sleep.

Suddenly he wakes, gasping from a nightmare.

He is lying on the kitchen floor. The house is quiet.

ULEE stares up--

at the bottom of the kitchen table.

ULEE washes his face at the sink,

and dries off with a towel.

He grabs a thermos from the counter,

exits through the back door,

and climbs into his pickup truck. The flatbed lift truck stands empty nearby.

74. INT. PRISON VISITOR'S ROOM -- DAY

ULEE and JIMMY sit across from each other, leaning forward with forced whispers. Both upset:

ULEE
But you said you never saw that kind of money.

JIMMY
That's what I told everybody. 'Cept Helen.

ULEE
But how could you have gotten your hands on that without everybody else knowing?

JIMMY
Those little armored vans don't usually carry bank deliveries. Eddie and Ferris looked in the usual places and found what they expected. While they were dealing with the guards up front, I spotted an unmarked bag and threw it in my trunk. I didn't really mean to keep it all, but when we got split up, and I got caught... Damn! How could she tell them? How could she be such an idiot?

ULEE
She was in terrible shape, Jimmy. I don't want to think about what she might have been through.

JIMMY
(crushed)
It was supposed to be payment for this... this lousy life.

ULEE
You've got to tell the law.

JIMMY
Sure, dad. They'd give me another ten, and find some way to keep it and screw me at the same time.

ULEE
At least it would be out of your hands.

JIMMY
No. There's got to be some way. Not all this time. This shit!

ULEE
Eddie meant it, Jimmy.

JIMMY
Eddie's a coward.

ULEE
Not with Ferris around, he's not. You know that better than I do... They'll come after the girls. They'll come after all of--

JIMMY
You gotta get rid of them. You're an ex-jungle fighter, for god's sake, and they ain't worth shit. Kill 'em! You'd be doing the world a big favor.

Part of JIMMY must mean this with all his heart. ULEE let's JIMMY'S fury and his own alarm settle, then quietly and in the most emphatic tone:

ULEE
I didn't hear that, Jimmy.

JIMMY glares back at ULEE,
then turns away,
eyes glistening with tears of helpless rage.

JIMMY
When Eddie called, I had an idea this was what it was about. Fuck! ... You know your yard near Blood Springs?

ULEE
You mean--

JIMMY
Right under your nose the whole time. It's in a cooler under that old tractor out in the pond. Look under a board wedged between the axle and the right rear wheel.

ULEE
God damn, Jimmy... What a mess!

JIMMY
(nods) Eddie said to tell you to call him after we'd talked. Now I know why.

JIMMY grins, then sobers quickly. He notices how utterly exhausted ULEE appears.

JIMMY
You gonna be O.K.?

ULEE
Sleep is all... Wish us luck.

75. EXT. INTERSTATE GAS STATION -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE appears distracted as he stands by a pay phone and listens to the phone ringing.

He hears a DESPERATE SCREAM OF PAIN and spins--

A young boy is being tickled by his father, the SCREAM part of a LONG HELPLESS LAUGH.

Someone picks up the phone.

EDDIE(on phone)
Speak to me.

ULEE(confused)
Eddie. It's Ulee Jackson. Jimmy said I should let you know we had our conversation and that delivery is underway.

EDDIE(on phone)
I knew it! Goddamn fantastic.

YOUNG BOY(off camera)
No fair. NO FAIR!

FATHER(off camera)
Is that right?

ULEE is confused by the noise of the family. He turns and watches--

YOUNG BOY
I give. I give, I give, I give!

The MOTHER and YOUNG DAUGHTER approach.
The FATHER lets the BOY go, giving his hair a tender rub.

The MOTHER carries an extra ice cream cone that she hands to the smiling happy child. The family climbs into a large late model station wagon.

EDDIE(on phone)
Hello?.. Ulee? Are you still there?

ULEE(turns to phone)
Yeah, Eddie. I'm afraid so. Look. I'm still gonna need a couple of days yet. I can be down there on Saturday like we said.

EDDIE(on phone)
No funny stuff, right Mr. Jackson?

ULEE
No, Eddie. No funny stuff. I've got to go.

EDDIE(on phone)
Isn't this a happy day! We'll see you.

ULEE hangs up the receiver,
turns
and absently steps off the curve.

A HORN HONKS violently close.

ULEE jumps back just in time to avoid being hit by the family in their station wagon.

He stands, a lone still figure in the mass of traffic.

76. INT. ULEE'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

An exhausted ULEE returns to find HELEN in the kitchen trying to wash a few dishes. She is still very weak and pale from the drugs and past year, but she tries a smile.

ULEE is surprised and on guard as he quietly closes the door behind him. The following is hard, but genuine:

ULEE
How are the kids?

HELEN
Asleep. Do you need some food or something?

ULEE
A glass of water would be nice... just from the faucet.

HELEN gets a clean glass from the rack, fills it at the tap, and hands it to ULEE.

ULEE gulps the water down-- it must be the best drink he's ever had. HELEN looks on, strangely amused.

HELEN
It's good to be back.

ULEE, turning self-conscious, wipes his mouth and gives the glass back to HELEN.

ULEE
Thanks.

HELEN
And thank you. For getting me out of Orlando. And for bringing me home.

ULEE
... I'm afraid we're not over Orlando yet.

HELEN
What do you mean?

ULEE
The money from that holdup. Eddie and Ferris found out Jimmy had it after all. I'm supposed to bring it to them this weekend.

HELEN at first doesn't answer, a terrible thought dawning. Eyes wide, she shakes her head in denial, then suddenly slumps in a chair, defeated.

HELEN
It's my fault, isn't it? They got me thinking they knew about it all along. Acted like they knew it was hid, knew Jimmy hadn't told me where. Talked about when Jimmy got out, we'd all go to Mexico together... If they hadn't found me, they would never have known... I was so messed up. I'm sorry.

Hands wringing, she seems about to snap.
ULEE takes her arms and gently holds and rubs her hands.

ULEE
Don't fret, Helen. That's no kind of secret to have to keep. That money is nothing but trouble.

HELEN
But what are you gonna do?

ULEE
Probably give it to them. Eddie and Ferris are too slick, and there's no telling what the law might make of Jimmy and all that cash.

HELEN folds a dish towel with forced deliberation, clearly alarmed about what lies ahead.

77. INT. LIVING ROOM -- MORNING

ULEE is asleep on the sofa.

He awakes to the sound of WHISPERING from the KITCHEN.

PENNY(off camera)
Is Ulee gonna wake up?

CASEY(off camera)
He's real tired, Penny. We'll let him rest this morning.

PENNY(off camera)
Yeah. We'll let him rest.

He turns to watch through the door--

PENNY and CASEY sit quietly eating breakfast.

ULEE looks on a moment,

then turns to look outside.

78. EXT. HONEY HOUSE -- LATE AFTERNOON

A large panel truck stands open, half filled with drums of honey.

ULEE and CHANCE each haul more drums into the truck.

The truck door closes.

ULEE wipes his hands. He appears distracted.

CHANCE, holding receipt book and pen, has noticed this.

CHANCE
Damn it, Ulee. I was counting on thirty drums of tupelo.

ULEE
Eighteen's all I could manage. At least you got the bakery grade.

CHANCE
It's the first time you've ever let me down.

ULEE
Stuff has come up. I havn't even managed to move all the bees yet... If you still want it, the rest should be ready next week.

CHANCE
I'll let you know.

ULEE
Yeah, Chance.You let me know.

ULEE starts to climb into his flatbed truck.

CHANCE
I'll be damn, Ulee. In all these years... don't you want a receipt?

ULEE
Of course. Where is it?

CHANCE fills out a receipt,

tears it off,
and hands it to ULEE.

CHANCE
You O.K.?

ULEE
(considers talking, but then denies)
Why shouldn't I be?

CHANCE
No reason. I'll call.

ULEE
(waves receipt) Thanks for this, Chance. As always.

CHANCE pulls out in the panel truck,

leaving ULEE alone among his old hives, drums, and fears. He climbs into his truck and closes the door.

79. EXT. TIGHT MONTAGE OF MOVING BEES TUPELO YARD 3 -- DAY

A load of hives rises from their old base and swings over onto the bed of the truck.

79A. EXT. RURAL ROAD -- DAY

The loaded truck charges past.

80. EXT. SUMMER YARD -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE stacks supers on the last of the hives.

ULEE moves quickly, working with a sense of dark distraction.

81. EXT. GROCERY STORE -- DUSK

ULEE exits pushing cart with bags of groceries.

He stops frozen as he sees--

the SHERIFF standing a short distance away by his patrol car talking with two young men.

ULEE seems ready to approach.

but BILL is looking away and seems fully occupied.
He mumbles something quietly to the others.
They all suddenly break out in laughter.

ULEE stares a moment longer,
then turns away
and heads towards his flatbed truck.

82. EXT. BACKYARD -- DUSK

ULEE is reaching for a third bag,
an awkward but manageable load.

CONNIE drives up at the same time.

She seems in good spirits as she gets out of her car

and practically runs over to join ULEE.

CONNIE
Can I help?

ULEE
Thank you, Miss Hope, but I can manage.

CONNIE
(kidding)
Tough man Jackson, carries his own groceries.

She tries to take a bag anyway.

ULEE
That's not necessary. Connie. Really.

Both yield a bit. CONNIE smiles.

CONNIE
(tenderly) Are you a pure chauvinist gentleman? Or are you just afraid I'll expect a tip?

ULEE is aware of his own desire to respond to CONNIE'S warmth. He feels cornered, confused. This can't work.

ULEE
My dad died when he was fifty-four years old. I'll turn fifty-one in July and I feel a million years older.

CONNIE
What does that mean?

ULEE
I'm a bad loser, Connie, and it's all I can do to try to take care of this family. I can't be, shouldn't be, taking on new things. New feelings, risks. New ties. And this... this is something I haven't dealt with in so long...

CONNIE stares at ULEE, head stiff, smile vanishing.

CONNIE
You're almost a good man, Ulee Jackson, but you try too hard... Have Helen call if she needs anything.

CONNIE walks back to her own yard and house.

ULEE watches her with longing and regret.

Finally he turns and heads toward the back door.

83. INT. KITCHEN -- DUSK

ULEE places the bags of groceries on the counter then freezes.

He realizes there are no sounds,
that no one has come to greet him,
that something is terribly wrong.

He turns and moves slowly toward the LIVING ROOM door.

84. INT. ULEE'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

ULEE enters to find--

HELEN and the girls sitting frozen on the sofa. EDDIE sits across from them with his gun casually on the arm of his chair. FERRIS is busy eating a piece of chicken and drinking a beer.

EDDIE
You don't have a t.v.

ULEE
It broke... I thought I had until Saturday. I'm supposed to meet you down state.

EDDIE
We got tired of waiting, so we decided to pay YOU a visit instead. Who was the lady?

ULEE
No one. She rents from us. The place next door.

EDDIE
Isn't that sweet?

ULEE
If you say so. Actually, it's a relief to see you, Eddie. Now we can get this whole thing over with in a hurry.

ULEE works to stay calm as he crosses and sits in a chair facing EDDIE.

HELEN appears harassed and in shock, PENNY a limp bundle beside her. CASEY sits a short distance away listening to every word and furiously on guard.

ULEE
Where's your car? I didn't notice it outside.

EDDIE
Near the Gulf station. We thought it'd be safer there.

CASEY
Don't tell them anything, Ulee. They're full of crap.

FERRIS
Ain't she a peach, Eddie? Just like her ma.

FERRIS leans over and strokes CASEY'S knee, then moves his hand higher and grabs her thigh.

ULEE, face grim, doesn't move.

CASEY twists away, and spits back.

FERRIS slaps her, hard.

Her head reels, but she quickly sits back up full of defiance.

CASEY
You're assholes for what you did to my mom!

FERRIS
We didn't do it all, honey. But we do know a thing or two.

FERRIS returns to stroking CASEY'S bare leg.

ULEE
(barely under control)
Hurt anyone of them, and you'll never get anything.

EDDIE senses the danger and moves to get the discussion on track:

EDDIE
Leave it alone, Ferris. Now Mr. Jackson, you can see we got to get Ferris' mind out of the gutter. Only a few things can do that. One's money... Where is it?

ULEE
One of my bee yards in the swamp. I'll have to take you, 'cause we'll need a four wheel drive, and you'd never find it.

EDDIE
Ain't that something! And to think we owe it all to Helen. *Gracias*, Helen, for letting the cat out of the bag.

HELEN
(weak defiance)
You shits!

EDDIE
We had to find out. We had a right. (gets up) And now, Mr. Jackson, lets go take that ride. Ferris, you stay put, and I'll be back soon as we get it.

FERRIS seems pleased enough with this plan as he leers towards CASEY.

ULEE
Can't do it, Eddie.

EDDIE
What do you mean, "can't do it?"

ULEE
Like you said, Eddie, Ferris needs distracting. He comes with us.

FERRIS
Let me just beat it out of him, Eddie. I don't like his uppity attitude.

EDDIE weighs the options.

With hidden control, ULEE sighs and calmly brings his hands together, finger tips lightly touching.

EDDIE
What the hell. We'll all go. Ferris, take care of the phone.

FERRIS is clearly disappointed, but moves.

EDDIE
I don't have to tell you what happens if the money's not there.

ULEE acknowledges the threat.

JUMP TO:

The phone's wall mount being pulled from phone.

Three straight chairs are jammed next to each other.

HELEN'S wrists are tied behind her back.

Then CASEY'S

and PENNY'S.

Their mouths are taped.

ULEE checks the knots.
FERRIS paces behind him.

FERRIS
Eddie, this seems like a lot of bother. Why not--?

EDDIE
Shut up, Ferris. We're doing fine.

ULEE
I'm sorry about this, Helen. I'm sorry about a whole lot of things. (whispering) Wait 'til we've gone, then do whatever it takes to get out of here.

HELEN looks up at ULEE in alarm.
Why is he talking this way?

EDDIE
Let's go, Mr. Jackson.

ULEE smiles back to HELEN
then turns and walks to the door.

EDDIE gives the room a quick once over

then turns out the lights
and closes the door. HELEN, CASEY and PENNY sit motionless, barely visible against a window.

We hear the SCREEN DOOR SLAM,
then DISTANT MUMBLES as the men move away.

Someone outside begins to COUGH loudly.

ULEE(off camera)
Damn! Got a tickle.

EDDIE(off camera)
Watch it, Mr. Jackson.

ULEE(off camera)
Don't you worry, Eddie, you won't get any trouble from here. But I should get a bigger flashlight.

EDDIE(off camera)
We got one in my car. Let's go.

A TRUCK DOOR OPENS. The three silhouettes begin an awkward wobbling dance toward the door.

85. EXT. ULEE'S HOUSE AND TRUCK -- NIGHT

ULEE starts his truck.
EDDIE and FERRIS sit next to him in the cab.

He looks over toward Connie's house. Thinks he sees--

a curtain rise slightly.

He hopes so, as he shifts into gear,
and begins to move.

86. INT/EXT. CONNIE'S WINDOW -- NIGHT

From inside, we watch as the truck pulls away.

CONNIE looks worried.

Suddenly she turns and runs.

87. EXT. ULEE'S BACKYARD -- NIGHT

She continues outside
and towards Ulee's house.

88. INT. ULEE'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

She calls out inside the kitchen.

CONNIE
Helen? Casey?..Anybody there?

No answer.
Then MUFFLED GROANS.

CONNIE rushes to the door.

89. INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

CONNIE turns on lights to reveal--

the THREE tied in the middle of the room, eyes blinking in the glaring overhead light. HELEN has fallen on the floor. CASEY has made it half way to the door.

90. EXT. SIDE STREET AND TRUCK -- NIGHT

Ulee's truck stops,
FERRIS jumps out
and runs up to Eddie's Dodge Charger. The GAS STATION is visible a short distance down the block.

FERRIS reaches inside the car,
grabs a large flashlight,
and runs back toward the truck.

He jumps in,
the truck pulls out.

91. EXT. TRUCK AND GAS STATION -- NIGHT

ULEE, EDDIE and FERRIS sit jammed into the front seat.

The GAS STATION zips by behind them.

ULEE knows he is on his own.

92. EXT. CHIPOLA BRIDGE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Headlights light the concrete sides of the bridge to the marsh.

93. EXT. MARSH HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

The truck slows,

turns off the highway,

and onto the marsh dirt road.

94. EXT. MARSH ROAD -- NIGHT

Tires splash through water.

The headlights cut their way

through gray white branches and limbs.

95. EXT. TUPELO YARD #2 -- NIGHT

The truck drives up
and stops on top of the hive mound, headlights aimed out at the black water of the surrounding pond.

The THREE climb out of the truck.

EDDIE
Where are the bees?

ULEE
Moved to their summer sites.
This here's for the tupelo.

EDDIE
Always seemed like a stupid
business, messing with bees.

ULEE ignores and instead moves to the far edge of the mound, and shines the flashlight out onto the dark pond--

revealing the rusted and half-submerged old tractor.

ULEE
Jimmy said it's hidden under a board wedged between the axle and the right rear wheel.

FERRIS
Yahwee!

EDDIE
Get out there Ferris and let's see what we got.

Knife in hand, FERRIS climbs down off the mound and into the water.

FERRIS
Damn! It's cold, Eddie. Makes my balls ache.

EDDIE
Then be quick about it.

ULEE
Watch out for the moccasins.

FERRIS
No shit? You serious?

EDDIE casually takes out his gun and holds it on ULEE.

EDDIE
Don't go trying to spook us, Mr. Jackson. I'm in charge here. (shouts) Ferris! Just get the damn thing.

ULEE
I wouldn't lift a finger to protect that money.

EDDIE
That's good, Mr. Jackson. Real good. How's it going, Ferris?

FERRIS(off camera)
Feels like an old cooler!

ULEE
That's it.

96. EXT. NEXT TO TRACTOR -- NIGHT

FERRIS, head just above water in pulls hard at some submerged object.

FERRIS
It's wedged in mighty tight, but I'm getting it.

He pulls again with a painful grunt. Something breaks and he falls back in the water.

FERRIS
Fuck!

FERRIS tries to regain his footing when suddenly in front of him up pops an old algae covered Coleman cooler, it's lid secured with layers of duct tap.

97. EXT. TUPELO YARD MOUND -- NIGHT

EDDIE eagerly pulls the cooler out of the pond. FERRIS helps from the water.

FERRIS, dripping wet, cuts the tape off the lid.

The lid is opened

to reveal neatly packed plastic bags of money. The bills are still bound with wrappers barely visible through the aging plastic: FIRST FLORIDA BANK

FERRIS squeals with delight.

EDDIE stares wide eyed in ecstasy.

ULEE holds the flashlight on the proceedings, looking on with a mixture of disgust and sorrow.

Carried away, EDDIE sets his gun down on the lid of the cooler. Along with FERRIS, he begins to pull out bags,

and stack them on the ground.

FERRIS tears open a bag
and rubs his face with the cash.

EDDIE
Ain't it the prettiest stuff you ever saw? New Orleans, Vegas.

FERRIS
Acapulco.

ULEE is on alert, eyes staring at--

the gun.

He looks up at the two foes. There is motivation and perhaps time to go for the gun,
but at first ULEE doesn't move.

Then slowly, with casual indifference, he approaches.

His foot inches to the side,

and, reaching the gun,

kicks it away with a twist of his ankle.

EDDIE turns to see and SCREAMS

as the gun sails out through the darkness

and drops into the water with a gratifying splash.

FERRIS freaks as he jumps up
and moves at ULEE. His rage and angle are limiting, however, and ULEE manages to step out of the path of FERRIS'S lunge.

FERRIS recovers quickly,
and opens his knife, ready for attack.

FERRIS
You want me to cut him, Eddie? Just tell me where.

ULEE slowly bends a bit, the flashlight in hand, on full alert.

EDDIE is gasping for breath, in a fury, but not sure how to react.

ULEE
Neither of us needed that gun, Eddie. You've got the money. Now let's get on back.

EDDIE
(weighs the options)
No, Ferris. We need him to get us out of here. Pack it up. Let's MOVE IT!

EDDIE begins to put the money back in the cooler.

FERRIS is at first reluctant, but sight of the money redirects his attention and

he kneels to help.

ULEE stands in the shadows, grateful for the reprieve.

98. EXT. TRUCK ON MARSH ROAD -- NIGHT

ULEE drives through the tupelo marsh. FERRIS sits on the cooler in back. EDDIE sits scowling and on his guard.

EDDIE
You're chicken, that's it.

ULEE
That's what?

EDDIE
Why you didn't take the gun.

ULEE remains silent for a moment.

ULEE
You know, Eddie, meeting someone like you has done me a world of good.

EDDIE
I don't get it.

ULEE
It reminds me that there's all kinds of weakness in the world. Not all of it is evil. I forget that from time to time.

ULEE turns and smiles innocently at EDDIE.

EDDIE
Yeah? And you're full of crap.

ULEE shifts gears as the truck drives up

onto the highway

and heads off into the night.

99. EXT. TRUCK AND SIDE STREET -- NIGHT

FERRIS jumps out of the truck before it has completely stopped, grabs the cooler,
and begins to walk toward the Dodge.

EDDIE steps out of the truck and watches the transfer.

ULEE climbs out with Eddie's flashlight.

He walks around in front of the truck
and hands the light to EDDIE just as FERRIS has opened the door and put the money inside the Dodge.

ULEE turns and heads back to his door.

ULEE
You guys take care.

EDDIE
Sure thing, Mr. Jackson.

Suddenly EDDIE turns, knife open,
and rushes ULEE.

He stabs him in the back.

ULEE spins, blood already oozing out of a large gaping wound.

He glares at EDDIE.

EDDIE
Thanks for your help. That's for the stunt back there. Hope you're still glad we ran into you again.

ULEE doesn't answer, but stands legs apart, on guard. Even wounded, it would take some risk to confront him further.

EDDIE steps back, wiping his knife on his leg, and begins to laugh.

He turns and almost skips toward the car where FERRIS has already climbed into the passenger side.

ULEE fights the pain and shock and leans against the hood of his truck--

The DODGE begins to move out.

100. INT./EXT. DODGE AND GAS STATION -- NIGHT

Inside the Dodge, FERRIS tucks in his shirt, EDDIE straightens his hair.

FERRIS laughs his gleeful laugh, both grinning wildly.

They drive out onto the main road and past the GAS STATION.

Suddenly a SIREN WAILS.
The two jump as a PATROL CAR'S LIGHTS begin to whirl behind them.

BILL (on a speaker)
You in the Dodge. Pull over. Now!

FERRIS
Jesus! Eddie. What do we do?

EDDIE
Stay calm

FERRIS
We need the gun. Why'd you let Ulee toss it? What are we--

EDDIE
Shut up, Ferris.

He pulls over,
a broad friendly smile suddenly covering his face.

101. EXT. MAIN ROAD AND GAS STATION -- NIGHT

The Dodge stops.
The Patrol Car pulls up behind.

BILL climbs out.

A DEPUTY climbs out of the passenger side
and covers BILL
as he approaches the Dodge.

BILL comes up to EDDIE who has his driver's license ready.

BILL takes the license,
then leans over and looks inside.

BILL
I don't believe it. Eddie Flowers? And Ferris Dooley. It's been a long time.

EDDIE
Evening, Sheriff. We were just passing through. Thought we'd take a quick spin through town for old times sake.

BILL
(lying) You got a bad brake light. Did you know that?

EDDIE
No. No we didn't, Sheriff. We'll get it fixed the minute we can.

BILL
Where'd you boys say you were heading?

EDDIE
Orlando. Back to Orlando.

BILL pretends to be following a routine traffic stop,
filling out the form from the license.
He returns the license
and looks in back.

BILL
Is that your cooler?

EDDIE
No.

FERRIS
Yes!

BILL
Your cooler... it looks like its been in the water forever.

EDDIE
Fact is, we found it alongside the road... (trying to worm out of the situation) We were going to report it, sir. There's money in it. You'll be amazed.

FERRIS is getting increasingly agitated, and suddenly begins to cry. The ATTENDANT steps out from the station, curious about what is going on.

102. EXT. SIDE ROAD TOWARD GAS STATION -- NIGHT

ULEE is walking slowly toward the two vehicles--

From here the figures appear small as EDDIE and FERRIS climb slowly out of the car hands over their heads.

ULEE is fading fast.

He takes a few more steps and collapses.

LONG DISSOLVE TO:

103. INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- MORNING

ULEE comes to in a hospital bed, his shoulder wrapped in bandages. He looks up at the ceiling, disoriented.

He tries to lean forward,

but a hand moves in to stop him.

CONNIE(off camera)
Stay still!

He turns to see--

CONNIE
You're on my turf now.

ULEE sinks into the pillow.

ULEE
I'm not dead, then?

CONNIE
You're fooling a lot of folks if you are.

CONNIE offers ULEE a small cup of water

and helps him take a sip.
As he leans up, ULEE looks over to see--

SHERIFF BILL sitting quietly in the corner.

BILL
How's the shoulder?

ULEE tests it gingerly, nods O.K.

ULEE
My fault. I got cocky.

BILL
You were cut pretty bad. Why do you suppose Eddie and Ferris went after you?

ULEE
I don't have a clue.

BILL
Always knew those boys were trouble, but turns out they were thieves as well. They were the ones ran with Jimmy. Did you know that?

ULEE
(guarded)I had my suspicions.

BILL
Jimmy sure put himself and us through a lot of extra grief not ratting on those boys. I could never figure if Jimmy was really standing up for his buddies, or if maybe he had some longer range plan in mind... like the bank money.

Nothing moves in the room. ULEE waits for the worst.

BILL(continues)
... But now it seems these guys had the money all along. (knowing better) Must have come back figuring enough time had gone by. They told some wild story of you giving it to them, that you were in on it all along. But I knew better... Turns out there are three warrants out for those boys. Add grand theft and assault with a deadly weapon, should put them away for a long while.

ULEE
Let me know when they do get out. They're not friendly.

BILL
I still can't figure out, since they had all that money hidden away, why they bothered messing with you.

With some effort ULEE turns and looks directly at BILL:

ULEE
I didn't know anything 'till last week, Bill. And I didn't know exactly what to do.

ULEE and SHERIFF exchange understanding looks.

BILL
Must've been they wanted some of your honey. You get well now, you hear?

ULEE nods agreement and silent formal gratitude.

104. EXT. PRISON YARD -- MORNING

ULEE, HELEN, CASEY, holding a large picnic basket, and PENNY, carrying a role of paper, wind their way through the prison yard past other families visiting inmates--

JIMMY sits on top of a picnic table.

He stands as his FAMILY approaches.

The others hang back as

HELEN and JIMMY move near each other, a tentative hesitant moment of doubt,

then a sincere

long embrace.

Still holding each other, they lean back, HELEN searching JIMMY'S face.

HELEN
You're getting old.

JIMMY
I know.

JIMMY smiles at HELEN, then looks over to see--

CASEY and PENNY standing in the wings. They move forward.

CASEY
I wanted to put a few saws and guns in here, but all they'd let me bring was food.

He kneels down and they come up for their hugs.

CASEY
We miss you, Dad.

PENNY
Yeah... Dad.

JUMP TO:

POST-PICNIC. An impressive meal has been consumed.

PENNY clings to HELEN and looks out at her family--

CASEY sits next to JIMMY who holds one of Penny's drawings in one hand, and a photo in the other. CASEY points out something in the photo:

CASEY
Panama City. Spring break. He's cuter than this.

JIMMY
I'm sure he is, but does he treat you right.

CASEY
I'm not taking any crap from him if that's what you mean.

JIMMY and HELEN smile.

JIMMY
That's good. Tell him your old man might be out next year, and your friend will have an ex-con on his case if he ever messes up.

This takes CASEY, and everyone else by surprise. ULEE especially takes it with some emotion.

ULEE
Is that true?

JIMMY
'Much as these things can be.

ULEE turns away, fighting back tears of hope.

ULEE
It's still a hell of a long time.

The two men sit side by side staring ahead--

at the prison yard, the visiting families, and beyond.

JIMMY
And how are YOU feeling?

ULEE
Fine. With the shoulder and all, I got behind for a spell, but Charley Meyers has done a real good job of helping me get caught up.

JIMMY
And the bees?

ULEE
(shakes his head) Hell. The mites are choking them, the insecticides are killing 'em, the drought is starving them, and... (smiles) they're fine.

JIMMY
... You think there might be something for me to do back with the bees?

ULEE
I don't know, Jimmy. The future of bees isn't too clear right now. The mites and stuff is for real, and--

JIMMY
Anything would be grand compared to where I'll be coming from.

ULEE
... I'll start an increase yard this winter.

JIMMY
... Hope I can remember how to work.

The two smile, allowing in some tentative hope for their uncertain future.

The group sits quietly for a time, glad to be together.

105. EXT. ULEE'S BACK YARD AND STEPS -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE, with bags of groceries, whistles his way up the steps to house.

106. INT. ULEE'S KITCHEN -- LATE AFTERNOON

ULEE walks in on HELEN and the girls.
HELEN and CASEY are laughing at something.

ULEE
What's up?

HELEN
Nothing, Ulee.

CASEY
Just girl talk. You wouldn't understand.

They can't control themselves and begin to laugh again.
ULEE pretends indifference and looks down at--

PENNY, who is busy pressing out cookies on the table.

ULEE leans over.

ULEE
Looks good.

PENNY
Yeah!

She looks up with a warm smile,
but soon returns with serious purpose to her work.

ULEE smiles,

puts up the milk,
and heads to the door with a gentle sorrow.

107. EXT. ULEE'S WORK SHED -- DUSK

ULEE works at his bench assembling a hive.

The sound of LAUGHTER comes from the kitchen.
ULEE feels lonely and annoyed at himself.
A car pulls up next door.

ULEE looks up to see--

CONNIE approaching.

CONNIE
Don't you ever stop?

ULEE
There's always something...

He reaches over the counter
and offers CONNIE a large jar of honey.

ULEE(continues)
I always keep my neighbors supplied... Thanks, Connie, for everything.

CONNIE
Thank you, Ulee.

There's another round of LAUGHTER from inside.
ULEE seems tense despite himself.

CONNIE
Looks like things are going all right?

ULEE
Helen and the kids are making up for lost time.

CONNIE
That's good.

ULEE
(trying to kid)
And I feel like an old drone bee. They don't need me now. Least not like before...

CONNIE
(laughs) Poor Ulee! Must be hard. (recovers) I'm sorry.

ULEE
How 'bout supper? They'd... We'd all love to have you.

CONNIE
Beats a t.v. dinner.

We stay behind as they head toward the back steps.

CONNIE
What's so special about this tupelo honey of yours, anyway?

ULEE

It doesn't crystallize, no matter how long it's out, the taste is fantastic, and it's very rare. In the whole world tupelos grow only along the rivers in these parts, and the blossom only lasts about two weeks. You gotta be there when it happens, or you're out of luck.

They go inside.

The camera moves nearer and up to a window.

Through the window we watch as HELEN and her children move around the table
welcoming ULEE and CONNIE.

Pull back. A WHIPPOORWILL SINGS in the distance.

THE END